

Veterans Approving Agency

Creating Opportunity



When David Nabors finished his four-year stint with the Marine Corps in 1996, he did what a lot of veterans do – he used his G.I. benefits to go to school. After getting an associate degree in liberal arts from Arkansas State University in Beebe, he started a family and entered the workforce – as a transportation dispatcher.



A few years ago, he realized that, although he was making a decent wage, he wanted to do something more with his life. That's

when he was offered a job – with a future – at Arkansas Automatic Sprinklers in Cabot. There was a hitch. Since he had no training in fire protection design, he'd have to start at the bottom and work his way up. That meant a big cut in pay for the short term.

It was an opportunity David didn't want to pass up, because the long-term benefits would be substantial. But he was worried about providing for his family for the first few years when less money would be coming in. Then he saw a brochure about on-the-job training at the Veterans Hospital. "I didn't know it was even out there," he says of the program.

David contacted the state Veterans Approving Agency to learn more about the program, which is part of the G.I. Bill educational benefits. Since he would be learning a skill on the new job, David could use the on-the-job training program to supplement his pay for up to two years. While the supplement didn't make up the

entire difference in pay, the tax-free benefit made it possible for him to switch careers.

"I could not have made the career change without that," David says. Instead of dispatching, he now designs fire sprinkler systems for commercial buildings and homes and is working on industry certification through the National Fire Protection Association. His only regret is that he didn't know about on-the-job training earlier.

David is one of 130 veterans currently participating in on-the-job training or an apprenticeship in Arkansas. (That's up from seven in 2000.) The on-the-job training benefit is paid through the workplace to wage earners. Veterans can be approved for the program for six months to two years.

An employer has to agree to participate in the program, but "it's a benefit they can give to an employee, and it costs them absolutely nothing," Sara Patterson, program manager of the state Veterans Approving Agency, says.

There's an added benefit to employers. They get dedicated workers with a positive attitude toward their job, Sara says. Those workers carry their military discipline into their civilian life, so they tend to be more punctual with less absenteeism, she adds.

